EXTRACTS

FROM THE WRITINGS

OF

DIVERS EMINENT AUTHORS,

OF

DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS;

AND AT

VARIOUS PERIODS OF TIME,

REPRESENTING THE EVILS AND PERNICIOUS

EFFECTS OF

STAGE PLAYS,

AND OTHER VAIN AMUSEMENTS.

By LINDLEY MURRAY,
WITH SOME ADDITIONS.

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EXTRACTS

FROM THE WRITINGS OF

DIVERS EMINENT AUTHORS.

From PASCALL.

"THERE is nothing more capable of letting us into the knowledge of human miſery, than an inquiry after the real cauſe of that perpetual hurry and confuſion, in which we paſs our lives. The ſoul is ſent into the body, to be the ſojourner of a few days. She knows this is but a ſtop, till ſhe may embark for eternity; and that a ſmall ſpace is allowed her to prepare for the voyage. The main part of this ſpace is raviſhed from her by the neceſſities of nature, and but a ſlender pittance left to her own diſpoſal: and yet, this moment that remains, does ſo ſtrangely oppreſs and perplex her, that ſhe only ſtudies how to loſe it. She feels an intolerable burden, in being obliged to live with herſelf, and think of herſelf; and, therefore, her principal care is to forget herſelf, and to let this ſhort and precious moment paſs away without reflection, by being amuſed with things that prevent her notice of its ſpeed. This is the ground of all the tumultuary buſineſs, of all the trifling diverſions amongſt men; in which our general aim is to make the time paſs off our hands, without feeling it, or rather without feeling ourſelves; and, by getting rid of this ſmall portion of life, to avoid that inward diſguſt

and bitterneſs, which we ſhould not fail to meet with, if we found leiſure to deſcend into our own breaſts.

We imagine that, at leaſt, ſome reſpite, ſome ſhelter, may be found, by agreeing to baniſh them from our meditation. This is the only natural comfort which mankind have been able to invent under their numerous calamities. But a moſt miſerable comfort it proves; becauſe it does not tend to the removal of theſe evils, but only to the concealment of them for a ſhort ſeaſon; and becauſe, in thus concealing them it hinders us from applying ſuch proper means as would remove them. Thus, by a ſtrange revolution in the nature of man, that grief and inward diſquiet which he dreads as the greateſt of ſenſible evils, is, in one reſpect, his greateſt good; becauſe it might contribute, more than all things beſides, to the putting of him in a ſucceſsful method of recovery. On the other hand, his diverſions, which he ſeems to prize as his ſovereign good, are, indeed, his greateſt evil; becauſe they are of all things the moſt effectual in making him negligent under his diſtemper: they do but amuſe and beguile him; and, in the concluſion, lead him down blindfold into the grave. It is, indeed, one of the miracles of Chriſtianity, that, by reconciling man to God, it reſtores him to his own good opinion; that it makes him able to bear the ſight of himſelf; and, in ſome caſes, renders ſolitude and ſilence more agreeable than all the intercourſe and action of mankind. Nor is it by fixing man in his own perſon, that theſe wonderful effects are produced; it is by carrying him to God, and by ſupporting him under the ſenſe of his miſeries, with the hopes of an aſſured and complete deliverance in a better life.

From the PRINCE of CONTI.

"The call which men have for diverſion, is not by far ſo great as is thought, and it conſiſts more

in imagination or in cuſtom, than in real neceſſity. Thoſe who are employed in bodily labour, have only need of a bare ceſſation from it. Thoſe who are employed in affairs toilſome to the mind, and but little laborious to the body, have only need to recollect themſelves from that diſpoſition which thoſe ſort of employments naturally cauſe, and not to diſſipate themſelves yet more, by diverſions which extremely engage the mind. It is a jeſt to fancy that one has need to paſs three hours in filling the mind with follies at a play. Thoſe who find in themſelves this need, ought to look on it, not as a natural weakneſs, but as a vice of cuſtom, which they muſt cure by ſerious employment."

"If the ſoul abandon itſelf to falſe pleaſures, it loſes the reliſh of ſpiritual ones, and finds nothing but diſguſt for *God*. When one feeds himſelf with the vain pleaſures of the world, the ſpiritual ſenſes become ſtupified, and incapable of reliſhing, or underſtanding, the things of God.——Now, among the pleaſures of the world, which extinguiſh the love of *God*, it may be ſaid that plays and romances hold the firſt rank; becauſe there is nothing more oppoſed to truth; and the Spirit of God, being a ſpirit of truth, can have no part with the vanities of the world."

"Plays and romances not only indiſpoſe the ſoul for all acts of religion and piety, but they give it a diſguſt, in ſome meaſure, to all ſerious and ordinary actions. As nothing is repreſented in them but gallantries, or extraordinary adventures, and the diſcourſes are far diſtant from ſuch as are uſed in ſerious affairs, one inſenſibly takes from them a romantic diſpoſition of mind: the head is filled with heroes; and heroines; and women, ſeeing the adorations which, in them, are given to their ſex, have that ſort of life ſo much impreſſed on their minds, that the affairs of their family and of common life, become inſupportable to

them; and when they return to their houſes, with minds thus evaporated and filled with theſe follies, they find every thing there diſagreeable, and eſpecially their huſbands, who, being taken up with their affairs, are not always in the humour of paying them thoſe ridiculous complaiſances which are given to women in plays, in romances, and in the romantic life."

"Thoſe deceive themſelves extremely, who think that plays make no ill impreſſion on them, becauſe they do not find them excite any formed evil deſire. There are many degrees before one comes to an entire corruption of mind; and it is always extremely hurtful to the ſoul, to deſtroy the ramparts which ſecured it from temptation."

"One does not begin to fall when the fall becomes ſenſible; the fallings of the ſoul are ſlow, they have preparations and progreſſions; and it often happens, that we are overcome by temptations, only by our having weakened ourſelves in occaſions which ſeemed of no importance: it being certain, that he who deſpiſes little things, ſhall fall by little and little."

"It muſt not be imagined that the wicked maxims of which plays are full, are not hurtful, becauſe people do not go there to form their ſentiments, but to divert themſelves; for they do not fail of making impreſſions, notwithſtanding, without being perceived.——For inſtance, the opinion that the chimera of honour is ſo great a good, that it muſt be preſerved, even at the expence of life, is what produces the brutal rage of the gentlemen of France. If thoſe who fight a duel were never ſpoken of but as fools and madmen—as indeed they are; if that phantom of honour, which is their idol, were never repreſented but as a chimera and a folly; if care were taken never to form any image of revenge, but as of a mean and cowardly action; the reſentment which men feel upon an affront would be infinitely weaker;

but that which exaſperates and renders it the more lively, is the falſe impreſſion, that there is cowardice in bearing an affront. Now, it cannot be denied that plays, which are full of theſe evil maxims, do greatly contribute to fortify that impreſſion; becauſe the mind being by them tranſported, and entirely out of itſelf, inſtead of correcting thoſe ſentiments, abandons itſelf to them without reſiſtance, and delights to feel the motions they inſpire, which diſpoſe it to produce the like upon occaſion."

——" God does not impute to us the coldneſs which proceeds from the withdrawing of his light, or merely from the heavineſs of this body; but, no doubt, he imputes to us that to which we have contributed by our negligence, and our vain diverſions. It is his will that we ſhould eſteem nothing ſo much as the gracious gift which he has made us of his love; and that we ſhould be careful to preſerve it by giving it nouriſhment. This command he has intimated to us in the perſons of the prieſts in the ancient law, whom he ordains always to maintain the fire on the altar, and to take care to put wood upon it every day in the morning. This altar is the heart of man, and every Chriſtian is the prieſt; who ought to be careful to nouriſh the fire of charity on the altar of his heart, by putting wood every day upon it; that is to ſay, maintaining it by the meditation of divine things, and by exerciſes of piety. Now, if thoſe who go to plays have yet any ſenſe of piety, they cannot diſown that plays deaden, and tend to entirely extinguiſh devotion; ſo that they ſhould not doubt, God judges them extremely guilty, for having made ſo little account of his love, that inſtead of nouriſhing and endeavouring to augment it, they have not feared to extinguiſh it by their vain diverſions; and that he will impute to them as a great ſin, the abatement or the loſs of their love to him. For if a diſſipation of the goods of the world and of earthly riches, by luxury and

gaming, is no little ſin, what muſt be judged of a diſſipation of the goods of grace, and of that precious treaſure the Scripture ſpeaks of which we ought to purchaſe, by the loſs of all the goods, and all the pleaſures of this life?"

From the Same.

"There will be many perſons ready to aſſert, that they have never received any ill impreſſion from *Comedy*; but I maintain, either that they are very few in number, or that they are not ſincere, or that they have not reflected enough on themſelves to perceive it, or elſe, that the only reaſon why *Comedy* has not corrupted their manners, is, becauſe *it found them already corrupted, and that they had left it nothing to do in this matter.*"

From the Same.

"It is impoſſible to conſider the buſineſs of a *Player*, and to compare it with the *Chriſtian profeſſion*, without being ſenſible that there is nothing more unworthy of a Child of GOD, and of a member of JESUS CHRIST, than this employment. I do not ſpeak of the groſs irregularities only, and the diſſolute manner in which the women appear on the Stage, becauſe they who juſtify *Plays*, always ſeparate thoſe ſort of diſorders from them in their imagination, though they are never ſeparated in *effect*. I ſpeak only of that which is abſolutely inſeparable from them. 'Tis an employment, the end of which is, the diverſion of others; where men and women appear on a Theatre, to repreſent the paſſions of *Hatred*, *Anger*, *Ambition*, *Revenge*, and chiefly that of *Love*. They muſt expreſs them as lively and as naturally as is poſſible for them; and they cannot do ſo, if they do not [illegible]

in ſome manner excite them in themſelves, and if their ſouls do not take all the changes which we ſee in their faces. Thoſe, then, who repreſent a paſſion, muſt be in ſome meaſure touched with it whilſt they repreſent it ; and it is not to be imagined, that they can preſently efface from their minds that impreſſion which they have voluntarily excited, and that it does not leave a great diſpoſition to the ſame paſſion which they have been ſo willingly ſenſible of. Thus, *Plays* are, even in their nature, a ſchool and an exerciſe of vice, ſince it is an art, in which one muſt neceſſarily excite in himſelf vicious paſſions. And if we conſider that the whole life of *Players* is employed in this exerciſe, that they paſs it entirely either in learning by themſelves, or rehearſing among one another, or in repreſenting to ſpectators the image of ſome vice ; and that they have ſcarce any thing in their minds but theſe follies ; we ſhall eaſily ſee, that it is impoſſible to join this employment with the Purity of our Religion. And thus it muſt be owned, that it is a prophane employment, and unworthy of a *Chriſtian* ; and that by conſequence, it is not allowable for others to contribute to maintain them in a profeſſion contrary to *Chriſtianity*, or to authorize it by their preſence."

CAVE, in his account of the PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS, ſays, " The Chriſtians of thoſe days went not to public feaſts, nor frequented the ſhews that were made for the diſport, and the entertainment of the people, and this was ſo notorious, that the heathens charged it upon them as part of their crime ; obſerve how in Minutius Fœlix, it is drawn up (ſaith Clemens Alexandrinus,) the Romans, ſays he, govern and enjoy the world, while you in the mean time are careful and mopiſh, abſtaining even from lawful plea-

ſures ; you viſit not the ſhews, nor are preſent at the pomps, nor frequent the public feaſts ; you abhor the holy games, the ſacrificial meats and drinks ; crown not your heads with garlands, nor perfume your bodies with ſweet odours : a ghaſtly, fearful and miſerable people :" which by the time that Octavius the Chriſtian comes to anſwer he grants it all to be true, and tells him ; " *there was* very good reaſon why they ſhould abſtain from their ſhews, pomps and divertiſements, at which they could not be preſent without great ſin and ſhame, without affronting their modeſty, and offering a diſtaſte and horror to their minds."

ARCHBISHOP USHER, ſpeaking of *Interludes* and *Stage Plays*, ſays, " They offend againſt many branches of the 7th commandment together, both in the abuſe of apparel, tongue, eyes, countenance, geſtures, and all parts almoſt of the body. For beſides the wantonneſs therein uſed, both in attire, ſpeech and action ; the man putteth on the apparel of the woman (which is forbidden as a thing abominable : *Deut.* 22, 5.) much *filthineſs* is preſented to the beholders, *and fooliſh talking and jeſting, which are not convenient :* Laſtly, *fornication and all uncleanneſs, (which ought not to be once named amongſt Chriſtians,)* is made a ſpectacle of joy and laughter. *(Eph.* 5. 3. 4.*)* Therefore they that go to ſee ſuch fights, and hear ſuch words, ſhew their neglect of Chriſtian Duty, and careleſſneſs in ſinning, whereas they willingly commit themſelves into the ſnare of the Devil. *(*1. *Cor.* 15, 33.*)*

ARCHBISHOP TILLOTSON, mentioning *Plays*, ſays, " They are intolerable, and not fit to be permitted in a civilized, much leſs a Chriſtian Nation : They

do moſt notoriouſly miniſter to vice and infidelity: By their prophaneneſs they are apt to inſtil bad principles into the minds of men, and to leſſen that awe and reverence which all men ought to have of GOD and *Religion*; and by their lewdneſs they teach vice, and are apt to infect the minds of men, and diſpoſe them to lewd and diſſolute practices."—— AND

AGAIN, "Some parents are ſuch monſters, as not to give good things to their children; but inſtead of Bread give them a Stone, inſtead of a Fiſh give them a Serpent, inſtead of an Egg give them a ſcorpion.

"Theſe are evil indeed, who train up their children for ruin and deſtruction, in the ſervice of the Devil, and in the trade and myſtery of iniquity: Who inſtead of teaching them the fear of the LORD, infuſe into them the principles of Atheiſm, Irreligion and Prophaneneſs; inſtead of teaching them to love and reverence religion, they teach them to hate and deſpiſe it, and to make a mock both of ſin and holineſs; inſtead of training them up in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make men wiſe unto Salvation, they allow them to prophane that Holy Book.

From Sir MATTHEW HALE.

"Beware of too much recreation. Some bodily exerciſe is neceſſary, for ſedentary men eſpecially; but let it not be too frequent nor too long. Gaming, Taverns, and *Plays*, as they are pernicious, and corrupt youth; ſo if they had no other fault, they are juſtly to be declined in reſpect of their exceſſive expence of time, and habituating men to idleneſs and vain thoughts, and diſturbing paſſions and ſymptoms when they are paſt, as well as while they are uſed."

CLARKE, in his *Eſſay on Study*, ſpeaking of *Plays* and *Romances*, ſays, " By what I have ſeen of them, I believe they are generally very indiſcreetly and fooliſhly written, in a way proper to recommend vanity and wickedneſs, rather than diſcredit them; have a ſtrong tendency to corrupt and debauch the mind with ſilly miſchievous notions of love and Honour, and other things relating to the conduct of Life."

WILLIAM LAW, *a Clergyman of the* CHURCH *of* ENGLAND.

" You own that God has called you to great purity of converſation; that you are forbid all *fooliſh diſcourſe*, and *filthy jeſting*, as expreſsly as you are forbid ſwearing; and that you are told to *let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth*, and yet you go to a houſe of corrupt communication; you hire perſons to entertain you with ribaldry, profaneneſs, rant, and impurity of diſcourſe; who are to preſent you with poiſonous ſentiments, and lewd imaginations, dreſſed up in elegant language; and to make wicked, vain, and impure diſcourſe, more lively and delightful, than you could poſſibly have it in any other ill company. Is not this ſinning with a high hand, and groſsly offending againſt the plaineſt doctrines of ſcripture."

" As prejudices, the force of education, the authority of numbers, the way of the world, the example of great names, may make people believe; ſo the ſame cauſes may make people act againſt all ſenſe and reaſon, and be guilty of practices which are utterly inconſiſtent with the purity of their religion."

" If impure ſpeeches; if wanton amours; if wild paſſions and immoral rant, can give us any delight,

is it not paſt all doubt, that we have ſomething of all theſe diſorders in our nature? and that we nouriſh and ſtrengthen them by thoſe gratifications?"

"There is no doctrine of our bleſſed Saviour, that more concerns all Chriſtians, or is more eſſential to their ſalvation than this, "Bleſſed are the pure in heart, for they ſhall ſee God." Now take the ſtage in its beſt ſtate, when ſome admired tragedy is upon it; are the extravagant paſſions of diſtracted lovers, the impure ravings of inflamed heroes, the joys and torments of love, and refined deſcriptions of luſts; are the indecent actions, the amorous tranſports, the wanton addreſs of the Actors, which make ſo great a part of the moſt ſober and modeſt tragedies; are theſe things conſiſtent with the Chriſtian doctrine of purity of heart?"

"All people who enter into theſe houſes of entertainment, or contribute the ſmalleſt mite towards them, muſt look on themſelves as having been ſo far friends to the moſt powerful inſtruments of ſenſuality, and to be guilty of contributing to an open and public exerciſe of ſplended impurity and profaneneſs. When we encourage any good deſign, either with our conſent, our money, or preſence, we are apt ot take a great deal of merit to ourſelves; we preſently conclude that we are partakers of all that is good or praiſe-worthy in it; of all the benefit that ariſes from it, becauſe we are contributors towards it. A man does not think that he has no ſhare in ſome public charity, becauſe he is but one in ten thouſand that contributes towards it (or becauſe it would go forward without his contribution) but if it be a religious charity, and attended with great and happy effects, his conſcience tells him, that he is a ſharer of all that great good to which he contributed. Now let this teach us how we ought to judge of the guilt of encouraging any thing that is bad, either with

our conſent, our money, or our preſence. We muſt not conſider how much our ſingle part contributes towards it, how much leſs we contribute than ſeveral thouſands of other people, *nor that the work would go forwards if we did not at all contribute to it ;* but we muſt look at the whole thing itſelf, and whatever there is of evil in it; or whatever evil ariſes from it, we muſt charge ourſelves with a ſhare of the whole guilt of ſo great an evil."

" People of faſhion and quality have great advantage above the vulgar ; their condition and education give them a livelineſs, and brightneſs of parts from whence one might juſtly expect a more exalted virtue. How comes it then, that we ſee as ill morals, as little religious wiſdom, and as great diſorders among them as among the moſt rude, uneducated part of the world ; it is becauſe the politeneſs of their lives, their courſe of diverſions and amuſements, and their way of ſpending their time, as much extinguiſh the wiſdom and light of religion, as the groſſneſs and ignorance of the dulleſt part of the world—Any way of life that darkens our minds, that miſemploys our underſtanding, that fills us with a trifling Spirit, that diſorders our paſſions, that ſeparates us from the ſpirit of God, is the ſame certain road to deſtruction, whether it ariſes from ſtupid ſenſuality, rude ignorance, or polite pleaſures. Had any one therefore, the power of an Apoſtle, or the tongue of an Angel, it would be well employed in expoſing, and diſſuading from thoſe ways of life, which wealth, corruption and politeneſs have brought among us. We indeed only call them diverſions ; but they do the whole work of idolatry and infidelity, and fill people with ſo much blindneſs and hardneſs of heart, that they neither live by wiſdom, nor feel the want of it, but are content to play away their lives, with ſcarce any attention to the approaching ſcenes of death, judgment, and eternity."

WILLIAM PENN, in his *No Croſs, No Crown*, ſays, " How many *Plays* did JESUS CHRIST and his *Apoſtles* recreate themſelves at? What *Romances*, *Comedies*, and the like, did the *Apoſtles* and *Saints* make, or uſe, to paſs away their time withal? I know, they bid all redeem their time, to avoid fooliſh talking, vain jeſting, profane babblings, and fabulous ſtories, as what tend to ungodlineſs, and rather to watch, to work out their ſalvation with fear and trembling, to flee fooliſh and youthful luſts, and to follow *Righteouſneſs*, *Peace*, *Goodneſs*, *Love*, *Charity*, and to mind the things that are above, as they would have *Honour*, *Glory*, *Immortality*, and *Eternal Life*."

ROLLIN, Principal of the Univerſity of Paris, and a zealous advocate for the moral and religious education of youth, recites the following paſſage from the writings of Rochefoucault, with approbation:

" All great diverſions are dangerous to a Chriſti-
" an: but of all that have been invented, there is
" none we have ſo much reaſon to fear as plays. The
" paſſions, in theſe entertainments, are ſo naturally
" and artfully delineated, that they are excited by
" them, and imprinted on our hearts, eſpecially that
" of love; and this more forcibly, when it is repre-
" ſented as chaſte and honeſt: for the more innocent
" it appears to innocent ſouls, the more ſtrongly are
" they diſpoſed to be affected with it."

POLITICAL.

Sir JOHN HAWKINS, ſpeaking of the pernicious effects of *Plays*, ſays, " Upon ſetting up or opening
" a certain Theatre, its contiguity to the City ſoon

" made it a Place of reſort, and what was apprehend-
" ed from the advertiſement of the *Plays* to be ex-
" hibited in that quarter of the town, ſoon follow-
" ed; the adjacent Houſes became *Taverns* in name,
" but in truth they were houſes of lewd Reſort, and
" the former occupiers of them, uſeful Manufactur-
" ers and induſtrious Artificers were driven to ſeek
" elſewhere for a Reſidence."

And he further remarks " that the Merchants of
" London then a grave ſagacious Body of Men, found
" the Theatre was a temptation to idleneſs and to
" pleaſure, that their Clerks could not reſiſt; they
" regretted to ſee the corruptions of Covent-Garden
" extended, and the Seats of induſtry hold forth al-
" lurements to Vice and Debauchery"—And again
he obſerves " That altho' of *Plays* it is ſaid, that
" they teach Morality, and of the Stage, that it is
" the mirror of human life, theſe aſſertions are mere
" declamation, and have no foundation in truth or
" experience, on the contrary a *Play Houſe*, and the
" Regions about it, are the very Hot Beds of Vice;
" how elſe comes it to paſs that no ſooner is a *Play*
" *Houſe* opened in any part of the Kingdom, than it
" becomes a *Halo* (or Circle) of Brothels.—Of this
" truth the neighbourhood of the Place I am now
" ſpeaking of has had Experience; One Pariſh alone
" adjacent thereto, having to my knowledge expend-
" ed the Sum of £1300 in proſecutions for the pur-
" poſe of removing thoſe Inhabitants whom the *Play*
" *Houſe* had drawn thither."

MONTAGUE, in his reflections on the riſe and fall of the antient republics, obſerves, on the account given by Plutarch, of the effects of theatrical entertainments above two thouſand years ago.

" Could we raiſe that venerable ſage (*Plutarch*)

from the grave to take a ſhort ſurvey of the manners of our own countrymen, would he not find an amazingly exact copy of thoſe of the Athenians? Would he not ſee the ſame ſeries of daily and nightly diverſions, adapted to the taſte of every claſs of people, from the public breakfaſtings (that bane of the time and induſtry of the tradeſman) up to our modern orgies, the maſquerade &c."

" This ſtrange degeneracy of the Athenian manners, which Plutarch ſo ſeverely cenſures, was firſt introduced by Pericles--he procured a law that every citizen was entitled to a gratuity out of the public money, for not only attending the courts of judicature and the aſſemblies of the ſtates, but even at the entertainments of the theatre, &c. thus Pericles *bought* the people with their own money; the conſequence of this corruption, we may learn from the writings of Demoſthenes, was, that in a few years time the Athenians were no more the ſame people."

" Athens, however, by her fall has left us ſome inſtructions &c. warned by her fate we may learn, that luxury and a prevailing fondneſs for public diverſions, are the never failing forerunners of univerſal *Idleneſs, Effeminacy and Corruption.* Reduced at laſt to a province of the Romans, Athens contributed her taſte, for arts and ſciences, towards *poliſhing;* and her paſſion for theatrical performances, towards corrupting the manners of that people."

" The regular drama (as it is called) was imported with the luxury of Greece, but every ſpecies of this kind of entertainment, whether tragedy, comedy, farce or pantomime, was comprehended under the general denomination of Stage-Plays, and the different performers alike ranged under the general Term of Players. The profeſſion itſelf was ſcandalous and proper only for *Slaves*, and if once a Roman citizen appeared upon the ſtage, he immediately forfeited his right of *voting*, and every other privilege of a free man."

" The generous Spartan, trained up in a ſtate when public virtue ſtill continued to be the object of public applauſe, could not behold the ridiculous aſſiduity of the *Choragi*, or magiſtrates who preſided at the public ſhews, and the immenſe ſums they laviſhed in the decorations of a new tragedy, without indignation."

BRITAINS REMEMBRANCER, *publiſhed in England in the year* 1745—*during the time of the Rebellion, the author in a pathetic expoſtulation with his countrymen on the diſſipation prevailing, and bringing into view many ſignal Providential deliverances extended to Great Britain in times of imminent danger and calamity; expreſſes himſelf on the ſubject of ſtage entertainments in the following terms:*

" Should I pretend to give a view of the wickedneſs of the Theatre, I ſhould not know where to begin or to what length the ſubject would carry me. For whether I inſiſted on the lewdneſs or impiety of moſt of the plays themſelves, on the infamous characters of the actors and actreſſes, on the ſcandalous farces they commonly tag the graveſt plays with, or above all on the inhumanly impudent dances and ſongs, with which they lard them between the acts; I ſay, whichſoever of theſe particulars I inſiſted on, each of them would furniſh matter for a great many pages, and much more, if I ſhould enter upon a full view of them all. Indeed the theatre is at preſent on ſuch a footing, that it is impoſſible to enter it, and not come out the worſe for having been in it; for now a days a good play is no other than a trap to draw in the modeſt and innocent to a love of theatrical entertainments; and the minds of the ſpectators are not the ſafer from being poluted and debauched, tho' the play itſelf be in the main decent and modeſt; ſince the ingenious contrivance of the managers entirely prevents the

good effects of any worthy ſentiment expreſſed in the play, by introducing a painted ſtrumpet at the end of every act, to cut capers on the ſtage in ſuch an impudent and unwomanly manner, as muſt make the moſt ſhocking impreſſion on every mind; and leſt the audience ſhould chance, in ſpite of all this, to carry away ſomewhat that might make their hearts the better, a ludricous and ſhameleſs farce concludes the whole, and with one ſtroke eraſes all the little traces of virtuous ſentiments that were formed by the play itſelf.

" I only beg leave to aſk you my dear countrymen, for what purpoſe you ſupport a ſacred order of men to teach you the pure and holy laws of the Chriſtian Religion, and at the ſame time encourage by your countenance and your riches a ſet of the very dregs of human nature, who make it their buſineſs to debauch your minds by their lewd compoſitions and wanton geſticulations, to fill them with impure and vile ideas, and to diſappoint the moſt diligent endeavours of a chriſtian miniſtry. Surely it can never be conſiſtent with common ſenſe to ſupport in the ſame country, one order of men for the propagation of virtue and Religion, and another for the deſtruction of them; to maintain one ſet of people for promoting a reformation of manners, and another for promoting an univerſal corruption."

" It is the ſaying of a Great man of the laſt age. That upon ſome accounts it were better that wicked men would fairly renounce chriſtianity than continue to profeſs it, and at the ſame time diſgrace it by their ſcandalous lives: And indeed it could be no ſuch matter of grief to good men to ſee a nation of barbarians overrun with vice and debauchery, as to ſee this nation once illuſtrious for its purity in doctrine and practice, celebrated for its martyrs, and which pretends to be the grand bulwark of the proteſtant religion; to ſee this nation I ſay thus ſunk to a pitch of lewdneſs in its public entertainments which at

Athens, where they worſhiped the unknown God, would have thrown the celebrated diverſions of the ſtage into utter diſgrace."

"And are theſe favourite pleaſures which ſo wholly engroſs and bewitch a chriſtian nation that we can not live without them even while an enemy is laying waſte our country, and expected every hour at our gates?

"And now my dear countrymen, what remains or what more is in the power of any private perſon, than after having thus laid before you a brief view of the national guilt that has brought the late troubles into our land, to conclude this little tract by earneſtly calling upon each particular rank to exert themſelves in their public and private ſtations for bringing about that general reformation which is neceſſary for averting a final and exterpating judgment."

CONCLUSION.

It muſt be evident to every ſober and unprejudiced mind, that the ſentiments of theſe enlightened men, on the corrupting influence, and the fatal amuſements, of the theatre, merit the moſt ſerious and attentive conſideration: and to ſome minds, it is apprehended, they will appear to be ſolid and awakening reflections.

If it be true, that many profane, indecent, and irreligious ſentiments are to be found in the works of dramatic writers, and theſe ſentiments coloured with the ſofteſt names, and recommended on the ſtage by the moſt captivating characters and actions;—if the ſenſes and imagination are ſo charmed with the elegance of the ſcenery, the richneſs of the dreſſes, the power of the muſic, the addreſs of the performers, and the gaity and ſplendour of the whole ſurrounding ſcene, as to deprive the mind of ſober reflection, and

agitate it too much for receiving benefit from moral and rational inſtruction—if theſe paſſionate and faſcinating exhibitions injure the delicacy of our beſt feelings, and gradually weaken our abhorrence of immoral indulgences; if they frequently break down the ramparts of our virtue, and lay us open to the inroads and government of vice and folly;—if they chiefly addreſs the inferior powers of our nature, our ſenſes, imagination, and paſſions, and regale them with ſuch high-ſeaſoned enjoyments, as too often vitiate our moral taſte, and not only indiſpoſe, but give us a diſguſt to every compoſition that is not much refined, and eſpecially to the Holy Scriptures, and thoſe ſober and religious ſtudies and engagements, which form the great duties of life, and promote our happineſs here and hereafter;—if the perſons who attend theſe places of diverſion, do neither look for, nor receive, any ſerious impreſſions from them, but, on the contrary, often find their minds enervated, and accompanied with a vain and romantic ſpirit;—if they occupy, in the peruſal and exhibition, in the preparation for them and langour after them, ſo much of our precious time, as to prevent us from attending to neceſſary and important concerns; and thus alſo ſuperinduce habits of indolence and diſſipation;—if they abound with flattering pictures of the world, and preſent, to the youthful mind eſpecially, ſuch highly finiſhed and captivating views of human life and happineſs, as are ſeldom or never realized; and hence, beſides an averſion or indifference to the ordinary duties and affairs of mankind, not unfrequently produce deep anxiety, diſappointment, and diſcontent through time;—if it be of importance to preſerve the principles and manners of the riſing generation pure and untainted, to prevent them from being governed by their imagination and paſſions, and to encourage in them modeſty, humility, moderation, and a reverence for piety and virtue;—if religion and

goodneſs muſt be ſupported by conſtant care and vigilance, and our preſervation from evil depends on our avoiding temptations, and praying daily for Divine aſſiſtance againſt it ;—if many great and good men have borne public teſtimony againſt the pernicious tendency of theſe amuſements ; and if numbers of ſerious and worthy characters of all denominations, have been convinced of the evils connected with them, and thought it their duty to avoid and diſcourage the attendance and ſupport of them ;—if Chriſtianity teaches us to conſider ourſelves as ſtrangers and pilgrims, travelling towards a better country ; and admoniſhes us not to love the world, nor to be conformed to its vain cuſtoms and faſhions, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and to maintain a ſteady ſelf-denial againſt the luſt of the fleſh, the luſt of the eyes, and the pride of life ;—if theſe are the common effects and conſequences of dramatic entertainments, and truths which cannot fairly be controverted, can we heſitate to acknowledge, that they are of the higheſt moment, and that it is incumbent upon us not to expoſe our principles and virtue to the influence of temptations, which are the more dangerous, as they are highly pleaſing, little ſuſpected, and ſeldom oppoſed?

What advantages can they yield us, that will compenſate the loſs or hazard of intereſts ſo important? All the pleaſures, and all the refinements which their warmeſt votaries have ever found in them, are indeed a poor recompence for the corruption, extravagance, and miſery which they have too frequently ſown the ſeeds of, and produced in human life.

It becomes us then, as rational beings, as Chriſtians, who are called to renounce the vanities of this tranſient precarious ſtate, and who have a permanent and better world in view, to aſſert the dignity of our nature, and to act conformably to the importance of

our deſtination. A few fleeting years will bring us all to the verge of an awful ſcene, when the vain diverſions and paſtimes, which are now ſo highly prized, will appear in their true light, a moſt lamentable abuſe of that precious time and talent with which we have been entruſted, for the great purpoſe of working out our ſoul's ſalvation. At that ſolemn period, the great buſineſs of religion, a pious and virtuous life, dedicated to the love and ſervice of God, will appear of ineſtimable value, and, in the higheſt degree, worthy of the concern and purſuit of reaſonable beings. Happy will it be for us, if we become wiſe in time, take up the croſs to all enſnaring pleaſures, for the few remaining days of our lives, and ſteadily perſevere, under the Divine Aid, in fulfilling the various duties aſſigned us, and in making ſuitable returns to the Author of all good, for the unmerited bleſſings which he hath bountifully beſtowed upon us. In theſe exalted employments we ſhall experience the nobleſt pleaſure, and feel no want of empty and injurious entertainments, to occupy our minds, or to fill up our time. In the ſcenes and productions of nature, and in the uſeful works of art ; in the faithful narratives of human life, and the deſcription of intereſting objects ; in the endearments of ſocial and domeſtic intercourſe ; in acts of charity and benevolence ; and in the pleaſing reflections of an upright and ſelf-approving mind, we ſhall perceive alſo abundant ſources of innocent refreſhment and true cheerfulneſs, as well as the means of enlarging our underſtandings and improving our hearts.

May thoſe perſons, therefore, who have doubts reſpecting the propriety of indulging themſelves in theatrical amuſements, and, indeed, may all who read theſe lines, ſeriouſly conſider the hazard of ſuch indulgences, and give the ſubject that attention which its importance demand. May thoſe eſpecially, who are convinced of their dangerous nature and tendency,

reject with abhorrence the ſolicitations of appetite and pleaſure, and the fallacious reaſonings which are often adduced in their ſupport. May we never be impoſed on by the common, but deluſive ſentiments, that moral and religious improvement is to be acquired from ſuch impure mixtures; and that the literary merit, and accurate knowledge of the human heart, which are diſplayed in many parts of dramatic works, will atone for the fatal wounds which innocence, delicacy, and religion, too frequently ſuffer from theſe performances. But being convinced that depraved nature will ever ſelect what is moſt congenial to itſelf; and that the pleaſures derived from refined compoſition, and the exhibitions of taſte and elegance, may be purchaſed at too dear a rate, let us reſolutely and uniformly oppoſe what we believe to be evil, however it may be arrayed; and do our utmoſt to diſcourage, by our example and influence, thoſe powerful and deſtructive engines of diſſipation, profaneneſs, and corruption.

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